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SUBJECT: DIVISIONS WITHIN CHAVEZ'S "PATRIOTIC ALLIANCE"

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Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR DANIEL LAWTON
FOR REASON 1.4 (D)

11. (C) Summary: Several former and current members of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) have broken ranks with the party to pursue their own political ambitions in the November 23 gubernatorial and municipal elections. Moreover, small pro-Chavez parties, such as Patria Para Todos (PPT) and the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV), are supporting their own candidates in many races. These dissidents--although hesitant to criticize Chavez directly--are a collective and public indication of infighting within Chavez's "Patriotic Alliance" coalition. They are also a marked contrast to the unified and monolithic image of the PSUV's predecessor, the Fifth Republic Movement (MVR). End Summary.

12. (C) The PSUV officially kicked off its national campaign on September 23, albeit without the President, who had left two days prior for travel to Cuba, Russia, China, France, and Portugal. In an apparent effort to underscore the party's "grassroots" support, Rodrigo Cabezas, spokesperson for the PSUV's finance commission, announced "a day of salary for the revolution," asking followers to donate a day's wages to finance PSUV campaigns. Cabezas told the media that the party had already received 1.5 million BsF (about \$750,000 USD on the official rate) through the initiative as of September 22. Chavez and his Cabinet members handed over personal checks for the party during a Cabinet meeting televised live. A state-owned bank manages the PSUV's coffers.

13. (C) Despite the public show of unity, Chavez's "patriotic pole" coalition--consisting of the PSUV, the Patria Para Todos (PPT) party, and the Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV)--has failed to find consensus candidates for a number of gubernatorial races. Of the 22 governorships up for grabs, the coalition has so far been able to agree on a single government-sponsored candidate in only 11 states, nine fewer than the opposition. Densely-populated Carabobo state has three "Bolivarian" candidates competing against a single consensus opposition candidate. In Portuguesa, historically a PSUV stronghold, PPT candidate Bella Maria Petrizzo is running as a strong third-party contender against PSUV's Wilmar Castro and the opposition's Jobito Villegas.

PSUV DISSIDENTS ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

14. (C) Luis Tascon, a deputy in the National Assembly and candidate for the mayorship of Caracas, has become one of the BRV's most high-profile critics since being expelled from the

PSUV in February. Running on an anti-corruption platform, Tascon has since founded the New Revolutionary Path (NCR) party to support his bid. On September 8, he publicly criticized those who "scream 'homeland, socialism, or death' and then climb into luxury cars to go to luxury mansions." The NCR has reportedly registered 250 candidates for the regional elections in November.

15. (SBU) Tascon has stated that he would be willing to support certain PSUV candidates, including those contenders for the governorships in Zulia, Falcon, Lara, Tachira, Meridia, and Guarico states. He has also specifically denounced several candidates close to Chavez, including Diosdado Cabello (Miranda), Bolivar Governor Francisco Rangel Gomez, and Jose Gregorio Briceno (Monagas), while falling short of denouncing the President himself. Tascon instead claimed that Chavez has been "kidnapped" by these followers and suffers from Stockholm syndrome, having "fallen in love with his captors."

16. (C) In Carabobo state, former Brigadier General Luis Felipe Acosta Carlez is running for reelection as a PSUV dissident against the government-sponsored candidate, state TV talk show host Mario Silva. While Acosta Carlez is not expected to win re-election, he is likely to pull votes away from Silva, giving opposition candidate and former Governor Henrique Salas Feo a distinct advantage. Acosta Carlez has been careful to blame the BRV's shortcomings--including his exclusion from PSUV candidacy--on the President receiving poor advice. He and Tascon have forged an alliance of sorts, publicly supporting each other's candidacy.

FACE-OFF IN BARINAS

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17. (C) Barinas, Chavez's home state, may prove emblematic of the internal conflicts brewing within Chavismo. The President designated his older brother and close confidant, Adan Chavez, to run for governor under the PSUV banner. However, the popular mayor of the Barinas municipality, Julio Cesar Reyes, is running as a Bolivarian alternative to Adan. Although many voters may see Adan as an extension of Chavez himself, his selection is likely to exacerbate charges of nepotism. Chavez's father is a two-term governor of Barinas, his brother Anibal is mayor of the family's hometown of Sabaneta, and younger brother Argenis is the state's secretary general. Cesar Reyes was reelected to his post in 2004 with 90 percent of the vote, and has an outside chance of beating Adan.

COMMENT

18. (C) The breaking of ranks within the PSUV and among its political allies undercuts the image of Chavez's movement as monolithic and united. President Chavez remains the most popular politician in Venezuela, and the PSUV enjoys more public support than any other party. Many of the dissident PSUV candidates are former high level Chavistas, but we assess that pro-government voters will in the end support Chavez's designees. Chavez's candidates are still likely to win 16 to 17 of the 22 gubernatorial races, according to local pundits. If, however, Chavez dissidents or allied pro-Chavez parties succeed in electing some of their own to prominent state and local posts, they could give new life to "Chavismo without Chavez," and pose a new political problem to the Venezuelan President.
CAULFIELD